

# Clergy

## Nature of the Work

Religious beliefs—such as Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, or Moslem—are significant influences in the lives of millions of Americans, and prompt many believers to participate in organizations that reinforce their faith. Even within a religion many denominations may exist, with each group having unique traditions and responsibilities assigned to its clergy. For example, Christianity has over 70 denominations, while Judaism has 4 major branches, as well as groups within each branch, with diverse customs.

Clergy are religious and spiritual leaders, and teachers and interpreters of their traditions and faith. Most members of the clergy serve in a pulpit. They organize and lead regular religious services and officiate at special ceremonies, including confirmations, weddings, and funerals. They may lead worshipers in prayer, administer the sacraments, deliver sermons, and read from sacred texts such as the Bible, Torah, or Koran. When not conducting worship services, clergy organize, supervise, and lead religious education programs for their congregations. Clergy visit the sick or bereaved to provide comfort and they counsel persons who are seeking religious or moral guidance or who are troubled by family or personal problems. They also may work to expand the membership of their congregations and solicit donations to support their activities and facilities.

Clergy who serve large congregations often share their duties with associates or more junior clergy. Senior clergy may spend considerable time on administrative duties. They oversee the management of buildings, order supplies, contract for services and repairs, and supervise the work of staff and volunteers. Associate or assistant members of the clergy sometimes specialize in an area of religious service, such as music, education, or youth counseling. Clergy also work with committees and officials, elected by the congregation, who guide the management of the congregation's finances and real estate.

Some members of the clergy serve their religious communities in ways that do not call for them to hold positions in congregations. Some serve as chaplains in the Armed Forces and in hospitals, while others help to carry out the missions of religious community and social services agencies. A few members of the clergy serve in administrative or teaching posts in schools at all grade levels, including seminaries.

## Working Conditions

Members of the clergy typically work long and irregular hours. Those who do not work in congregational settings may have more routine schedules. In 1998, almost one-fifth of full-time clergy worked 60 or more hours a week, 3 times that of all workers in professional specialty occupations. Although many of their activities are sedentary and intellectual in nature, clergy frequently are called upon on short notice to visit the sick, comfort the dying and their families, and provide counseling to those in need. Involvement in community, administrative, and educational activities sometimes require clergy to work evenings, early mornings, holidays, and weekends.

Because of their roles as leaders regarding spiritual and morality issues, some members of the clergy often feel obligated to address and resolve both societal problems and the personal problems of their congregants, which can lead to stress.

## Training and Other Qualifications

Educational requirements for entry into the clergy vary greatly. Similar to other professional occupations, about 3 out of 4 members of the clergy have completed at least a bachelor's degree. Many denominations require that clergy complete a bachelor's degree and

a graduate-level program of theological study; others will admit anyone who has been "called" to the vocation. Some faiths do not allow women to become clergy; however, those that do are experiencing increases in the numbers of women seeking ordination. Men and women considering careers in the clergy should consult their religious leaders to verify specific entrance requirements.

Individuals considering a career in the clergy should realize they are choosing not only a career but also a way of life. In fact, most members of the clergy remain in their chosen vocation throughout their lives; in 1998, 12 percent of clergy were 65 or older, compared to only 3 percent of workers in all professional specialty occupations.

Religious leaders must exude confidence and motivation, while remaining tolerant and able to listen to the needs of others. They should be capable of making difficult decisions, working under pressure, and living up to the moral standards set by their faith and community.

The following statements provide more detailed information on Protestant ministers, Rabbis, and Roman Catholic priests.

## Protestant Ministers

(O\*NET 27502)

### Significant Points

- Entry requirements vary greatly; many denominations require a bachelor's degree followed by study at a theological seminary, whereas others have no formal educational requirements.
- Competition for positions is generally expected because of the large number of qualified candidates, but it will vary among denominations and geographic regions.

## Nature of the Work

Protestant ministers lead their congregations in worship services and administer the various rites of the church, such as baptism, confirmation, and Holy Communion. The services that ministers conduct differ among the numerous Protestant denominations and even among congregations within a denomination. In many denominations, ministers follow a traditional order of worship; in others, they adapt the services to the needs of youth and other groups within the congregation. Most services include Bible readings, hymn singing, prayers, and a sermon. In some denominations, Bible readings by members of the congregation and individual testimonials constitute a large part of the service. In addition to these duties, ministers officiate at weddings, funerals, and other occasions.

Each Protestant denomination has its own hierarchical structure. Some ministers are responsible only to the congregation they serve, whereas others are assigned duties by elder ministers or by the bishops of the diocese they serve. In some denominations, ministers are reassigned to a new pastorate by a central governing body or diocese every few years.

Ministers who serve small congregations usually work personally with parishioners. Those who serve large congregations may share specific aspects of the ministry with one or more associates or assistants, such as a minister of education or a minister of music.

## Employment

According to the National Council of Churches, there were over 400,000 Protestant ministers in 1998, including those who served without a regular congregation or those who worked in closely



*Protestant ministers discuss religious and spiritual needs of parishioners with church members.*

related fields, such as chaplains in hospitals, the Armed Forces, universities, and correctional institutions. Although there are many denominations, most ministers are employed by the five largest Protestant bodies—Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian.

Although most ministers are located in urban areas, many serve two or more smaller congregations in less densely populated areas. Some small churches increasingly employ part-time ministers who are seminary students, retired ministers, or holders of secular jobs. Unpaid pastors serve other churches with meager funds. In addition, some churches employ specially trained members of the laity to conduct nonliturgical functions.

### **Training and Other Qualifications**

Educational requirements for entry into the Protestant ministry vary greatly. Many denominations require, or at least strongly prefer, a bachelor's degree followed by study at a theological seminary. However, some denominations have no formal educational requirements, and others ordain persons having various types of training from Bible colleges or liberal arts colleges. Many denominations now allow women to be ordained, but others do not. Persons considering a career in the ministry should first verify the ministerial requirements with their particular denomination.

In general, each large denomination has its own schools of theology that reflect its particular doctrine, interests, and needs. However, many of these schools are open to students from other denominations. Several interdenominational schools associated with

universities give both undergraduate and graduate training covering a wide range of theological points of view.

In 1998-99, the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada accredited 135 Protestant denominational theological schools. These schools only admit students who have received a bachelor's degree or its equivalent from an accredited college. After college graduation, many denominations require a 3-year course of professional study in one of these accredited schools, or seminaries, for the degree of Master of Divinity.

The standard curriculum for accredited theological schools consists of four major categories: Biblical studies, history, theology, and practical theology. Courses of a practical nature include pastoral care, preaching, religious education, and administration. Many accredited schools require that students work under the supervision of a faculty member or experienced minister. Some institutions offer Doctor of Ministry degrees to students who have completed additional study—usually 2 or more years—and served at least 2 years as a minister. Scholarships and loans often are available for students of theological institutions.

Persons who have denominational qualifications for the ministry usually are ordained after graduation from a seminary or after serving a probationary pastoral period. Denominations that do not require seminary training ordain clergy at various appointed times. Some churches ordain ministers with only a high school education.

Women and men entering the clergy often begin their careers as pastors of small congregations or as assistant pastors in large churches. Pastor positions in large metropolitan areas or in large congregations often require many years of experience.

### **Job Outlook**

Competition is expected to continue for paid Protestant ministers through the year 2008, reflecting slow growth of church membership and the large number of qualified candidates. Graduates of theological schools should have the best prospects. The degree of competition for paid positions will vary among denominations and geographic regions. For example, relatively favorable prospects are expected for ministers in evangelical churches. Competition, however, will be keen for responsible positions serving large, urban congregations. Ministers willing to work part time or for small, rural congregations should have better opportunities. Most job openings will stem from the need to replace ministers who retire, die, or leave the ministry.

For newly ordained Protestant ministers who are unable to find parish positions, employment alternatives include working in youth counseling, family relations, and social welfare organizations; teaching in religious educational institutions; or serving as chaplains in the Armed Forces, hospitals, universities, and correctional institutions.

### **Earnings**

Salaries of Protestant clergy vary substantially, depending on experience, denomination, size and wealth of the congregation, and geographic location. For example, some denominations tie a minister's pay to the average pay of the congregation or the community. As a result, ministers serving larger, wealthier congregations often earned significantly higher salaries than those in smaller, less affluent areas or congregations. Ministers with modest salaries sometimes earn additional income from employment in secular occupations.

### **Sources of Additional Information**

Persons who are interested in entering the Protestant ministry should seek the counsel of a minister or church guidance worker. Theological schools can supply information on admission requirements. Prospective ministers also should contact the ordination supervision body of their particular denomination, for information on special requirements for ordination.